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## Growing the North Carolina Oyster Trail (NCOT): A mixed method approach

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## **Growing the North Carolina Oyster Trail (NCOT): A mixed method approach**

The purpose of this presentation is to introduce a mixed method approach to developing a mariculture tourism product, the North Carolina Oyster Trail (NCOT). The NCOT represents a tourism product that can be developed in North Carolina (USA) to capitalize upon the international increase in the food tourism market and expansion of efforts to cultivate oysters and hardshell clams (i.e., mariculture) in the state. While there is great potential for the NCOT, considerable development efforts are needed in order to match the supply of mariculture tourism experiences with tourist demand. Furthermore, development efforts should include input from multiple stakeholders in the development of a mariculture tourism experience and ensure the sustainability of such an experience by aligning consumer demand with existing and future tourism supply. Thus we propose the use of a six stage mixed method approach for mariculture tourism development. These stages include: 1.) Measure shellfish mariculture tourism supply through Appreciative Inquiry workshops; 2.) Survey potential visitors to measure demand for shellfish mariculture tourism experiences; 3.) Compare shellfish mariculture tourism supply and demand; 4.) Identify, promote, and evaluate shellfish mariculture tourism experiences; 5.) Refine shellfish mariculture tourism experiences with additional demand data and evaluation results; and 6.) Establish resources to support recommended shellfish mariculture tourism development strategies. Ultimately the use of this mixed method approach to developing a regional shellfish mariculture tourism experience will provide outcomes that are valuable for the creation of the NCOT and future efforts to develop other regional food tourism products.